A South African Perspective on Learning in Social Movement Activism

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Abstract

There is a body of education scholarship in South Africa that captures the role played by social movements in democratising education in post-apartheid South Africa. However, this scholarship says little about how power dynamics affect learning and intellectual labour in social movements or social movement organisations. In addition, the issue of learning in social movements or social movement organisations is hardly explored in the South African social movement literature. This lack of focus on how activists, especially grassroots activists in working-class communities, learn and produce knowledge in social movements and organisations obscures the complexity of learning and knowledge production in activist settings. This article explores how activists, especially grassroots activists, learn in social movements. Based on secondary literature and interviews, the article advances two main arguments: First, learning in social movements and organisations takes place in non-formal and informal ways. Both these forms of learning take place inside and outside formal educational settings. And they both contribute to the empowerment and critical consciousness of activists in social movements and organisations. In addition, informal learning takes place inside and outside popular educational spaces. However, it is not inevitable that non-formal and informal forms of learning in activist settings will generate critical knowledge and activist practices that disrupt the status quo. Second, power relations based on "race", social class, gender, and sexuality, among other axes of social division, impact on how learning takes place in non-formal or popular contexts of education. This article seeks to understand how power relations shape the learning and knowledge production process in social movements and organisations.

Keywords: social movements; social movement organisations; non-formal learning; informal learning; power relations

Introduction

There is a body of education scholarship in South Africa that captures the role played by social movements in democratising education in post-apartheid South Africa (Thapliyal, Vally, and Spreen 2013). However, this scholarship says little about how power dynamics affect learning and intellectual labour in social movements/social movement organisations (SMOs). In addition, the issue of learning in social movements/SMOs is hardly explored in the South African social movement literature.

Choudry (2015) makes the point that to understand whether learning is emancipatory or not, it is necessary to address the workings of power in social movements/SMOs. For example, he writes: "I start from the premise that to discuss the emancipatory potential and prospects of activist learning and knowledge production we must at the outset address questions of power" (2015, 10). The inclusion of different voices and ideas in debates and decision-making enables grassroots activists to share and learn from different perspectives and experiences, instead of learning being confined to the insights of a few activists with more knowledge and skills, and with access to resources. Choudry (2015, 12–13) observes that the tendency in social movement narratives to focus on the contributions of famous individual activists, who are often heterosexual men in leadership positions, renders invisible how people engage in collective learning and contribute towards change.

Scholarly accounts of the crop of South African social movements that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s suggest intellectual labour in many of the movements was performed by a handful of middle-class activists (Ballard, Habib, and Valodia 2006; Benjamin 2004; Cottle 2004). Regarding the claim made by some scholars that the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) was a socialist movement (Dawson 2008, 320), John Appolis, who was the chair of the APF, observes that the movement's socialist politics did not grow out of community struggles (Appolis quoted in Cottle 2004, 115). It was not the outcome of engagements among grassroots activists, in which they made sense of their experiences within working-class communities, and, on that basis, developed a vision for social change. Appolis's observation raises questions about the extent to which grassroots activists in black working-class communities,[1] whose struggles were supported by social movements such as the APF, had access to, and influence in, activist debates in the movement. Reflecting on the organising practices in some of the movements, Nina Benjamin (Interview, N. Benjamin, 20 October 2020) asserts that "we all suffered a kind of Stalinisation of what movement-building was about".

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[1] Based on the ideology of Black Consciousness, I embrace Blackness as a political category representing all three subordinate racial groups (black Africans, coloureds, and Indians) that were casualties of colonialism and racial capitalism in South Africa. However, it is my contention that principled struggles for social justice require that we recognise differences in consciousness and social experience among and within these black racial groups.

Furthermore, the issue of learning, particularly informal learning, is hardly explored in the South African social movement literature. While left-wing scholars and activists have produced many narratives about social movements in post-1994 South Africa, discussions about learning and knowledge production in the so-called new social movements (NSMs) are modest.[2] The few existing scholarly observations about learning in social movements relate to non-formal educational activities (Endresen and Von Kotze 2005; Friedman and Mottiar 2004). The lack of focus on informal learning renders invisible the ways in which grassroots activists learn and develop knowledge outside organised or planned educational activities in social movements/SMOs.

Choudry (2015, 6) argues that learning in a social movement/SMO does not only occur in spaces created for learning and knowledge production, but that it also takes place in the streets, in informal discussions among activists, and it arises from their experiences. Learning occurs through the practices, activities and interactions that embody the life of a movement. For example, Robin Kelley contends that collective learning is an integral part of solidarity during social struggle. Solidarity is a political space for informal learning and knowledge production. For him, solidarity means listening and learning from those with whom we stand in solidarity. To exemplify this, he writes that "if women and queer people say these are the urgent issues, then we've got to stand behind them and support in solidarity *fully* as *comrades*, instead of *allies*" (Kelley quoted in Black Ink 2020; italics in original).

This article explores how activists, especially grassroots activists, learn in social movements/SMOs. Based on secondary literature and interviews with three social movement activists, it advances two main arguments: First, learning in social movements/SMOs takes place in non-formal and informal ways.[3] Both these forms of learning take place inside and outside formal educational settings. And they both contribute to the empowerment and critical consciousness of activists in social movements/SMOs. In addition, informal learning takes place inside and outside popular educational spaces. However, it is not inevitable that non-formal and informal forms of

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[2]   Activists use the term "new social movement" to describe social struggles in black working-class communities against the commodification of basic social services, against landlessness, and against the lack of genuine participatory democracy (McKinley and Naidoo 2004). This is different to its usage by Western European and North American post-structuralist scholars, who argue that the novelty of the so-called new movements resides in their emphasis on identity issues (Inglehart 1977; Melluci 1995; Touraine 1981). Mainstream social movement scholars ignore the class analysis of the movements (McAdam 1999). There are other scholars, such as Lorna Weir and David Plotke, who dispute claims about the newness of the movements. For example, Weir (1993) argues that the non-statist position of social movements of the 1960s did not represent a break from movements, such as the feminist movement and the abolitionist movement. Plotke (1990) rejects the notion that the movements were not concerned with socioeconomic issues. Many of the movements and movement organisations that Robin Kelley (2002) visits in *Freedom Dreams*, such as the Women's Liberation Union, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Third World Women's Alliance, and the black feminist movement recognised the interconnections between different forms of oppression.

[3]   I am aware that learning in social movements can also take place in a formal way. However, in this article, I am focusing on non-formal and informal forms of learning.

learning in activist settings will generate critical knowledge and activist practices that disrupt the status quo. Second, power relations based on "race",[4] social class, gender, and sexuality, among other axes of social division, impact on how learning takes place in non-formal or popular contexts of education. Thus, it is important to understand how power relations shape the learning and knowledge production process in social movements/SMOs. Because the issue of learning and knowledge production is under-researched in relation to South African social movements/SMOs, the narrative is exploratory; the views expressed in the article cannot be generalised to all movements/SMOs.

The three activists are Sibongile Shabalala, Wendy Somlavi, and Nosiphelele Msesiwe. Shabalala is the national chairperson of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). She joined the movement in 2009. Somlavi was a local organiser in Equal Education (EE) between 2017 and 2019. She organised and facilitated political education sessions for members of Equal Education in six schools in Cape Town. Msesiwe is a community organiser and an educator in the Social Justice Coalition (SJC). She was a branch secretary of the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) in Nkani—an informal settlement in Khayelitsha, Cape Town—before she joined SJC in 2015.[5] The three activists have experience of non-formal and informal learning in social movement activism. In addition, they provided useful insights into the way power impacts on learning in social movements/SMOs.

I argue that a social movement refers to a cluster of communities or social movement organisations (activist non-governmental organisations, community-based

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[4] It is now common knowledge that "race" is not a biological construct, even though science remains undergirded by racial logics, as Dorothy Roberts powerfully explains in *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-Create Race in the Twenty-First Century*, published in 2011. In the South African context, the persistence of the racial logics of science is clearly manifested in an article written by white students from Stellenbosch University titled "Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women", which was published in 2020 in *Aging, Neuropsychology, and Cognition* (Nieuwoudt et al. 2020). Based on interviews with 60 coloured women, the authors claim that coloured women between the ages of 18 and 64 years are at higher risk of "intellectual deficiencies", because of "low levels of education and unhealthy lifestyles" (2020, 10). Indeed, the article was roundly rejected, and the journal eventually withdrew it. Roberts (2011) points out that the myth of biological "races" has long been discredited. However, as the late Charles Mills (2012) argues, "race" does have a social existence. It influences our lived realities. Racialisation (or racial classification) is determined by the historical and sociopolitical context in which it unfolds, and changes to the sociopolitical context of a society influence the racialisation process (Omi and Winant 2017).

[5] In addition, I conducted a key informant interview with Nina Benjamin from the Labour Research Service. Nina Benjamin was a member of the Anti-Privatisation Forum. The four activists were approached because they have experience and knowledge about the dynamics of learning in activist settings in post-apartheid South Africa. The focus of the article was explained to them before the interviews, and no one received a financial or non-financial reward for participating in the interviews. Moreover, all four participants were given the option of anonymity or having their names published, and they all agreed to the latter. Lastly, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted online in November 2020.

organisations), or to a network of activists, with a common cause bound by a collective identity (Steyn 2015). In terms of this definition, Equal Education and the Social Justice Coalition are social movement organisations. The Treatment Action Campaign is a social movement, as it consists of card-carrying members in different provinces of South Africa, and of followers in different communities across the country.

Moreover, I employ Daniel Schugurensky's (2000) definitions of non-formal education and informal learning. Non-formal education refers to structured forms of teaching and learning that take place inside and outside formal educational settings (Schugurensky 2000, 2). Non-formal education may take the form of popular and political education as it includes issue-specific workshops, seminars, political schools, leadership training programmes, and the production of newsletters and journals, among others. Informal learning refers to forms of learning that are not directed by an instructor or an educator, and it can be incidental or intentional (Schugurensky 2000, 3–4). As Choudry (2015) explains, it is the type of learning that is embedded in everyday activism in communities, and on the streets. Schugurensky's distinction between non-formal education and informal learning helps to explain the complexity of learning and knowledge production in activist settings.

The Complexity of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Social Movement Activism

International scholars of social movement learning and adult education agree that both non-formal and informal forms of learning take place in social movements/SMOs (Choudry 2015; Foley 2001; Scandrett 2012). Non-formal and informal learning are interconnected; they make complementary contributions towards knowledge production, empowerment, and critical consciousness in social movements/SMOs. For example, Linda Cooper (2007) observes that, in addition to the planned/organised educational activities (popular education or non-formal learning) in the Cape Town branch of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU), workers learned new skills while participating in union meetings, and in their interactions with the management (informal learning).

Eurig Scandrett (2012, 44) indicates that popular education, which is characterised by both non-formal and informal modes of learning, can equip activists with "analytical tools" to interrogate existing theoretical knowledge, and to produce new knowledge. Popular education is an important organising practice in social movements/SMOs, even though its outcomes may not always be immediately visible. It can inculcate critical consciousness in activists, engender personal transformation within them, and lead to the development of new activist knowledge.[6] For instance, Somlavi observes that

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[6]   For example, as Angela Davis says, the outpouring of racial and class insurgencies on the streets of the United States of America (USA) after the murder of George Floyd, as well as the growing interest in a structural understanding of racism among activists in that country, could not have been possible without the organising work that takes place in movements and movement organisations, of which

popular education contributed towards developing critical consciousness in local organisers in Equal Education who were responsible for political education in the organisation's branches across the country (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020). Popular education sessions on inequality, on inequity, on the conditions of black youth, and on the Marikana massacre (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020), which Angela Davis refers to as "a reenactment of Sharpville" (Davis 2016, 17), among other issues, equipped the local organisers with important knowledge about the political economy of post-apartheid South Africa, and about the intractable social problems faced by black working-class young people. These sessions also allowed the organisers to develop activist perspectives on contemporary forms of oppression and discrimination in the country from the standpoint of precarious and marginalised black youth, women, and gender non-conforming people. Steven Robins and Brahm Fleisch (2016), in their study of Equal Education (EE), indicate that many of the organisation's local organisers were learners when they were recruited. They increased their political consciousness through EE's organising work and popular educational activities.

Popular education and training in the TAC contributed significantly to Shabalala's empowerment and critical consciousness. For example, she says:

> After a few months [of being in the TAC], I learned in group discussions and conversations that these people treat HIV like any other disease, so I came out to accept my status, and I managed to understand what is really happening to me, and it did not bother me anymore. That's when I was eager to learn about HIV treatment cycle. … When I was elected, I was a woman leading a team of men . … The men I was leading felt uncomfortable being led by a woman. And every time they wanted to manipulate any situation just because I'm a woman, and sometimes I would feel undermined by these men, because I'm a woman. (Interview, S. Shabalala, 28 November 2020)

Shabalala observes: "I never thought I could grow this far over the years fighting injustice, knowing constitutions, knowing policies and engaging on these things" (Interview, S. Shabalala, 28 November 2020). As the above quotation shows, popular education in the TAC was not her only source of learning. Shabalala gained important knowledge about HIV through her interactions with other activists in both non-formal and informal learning spaces that allowed her to resist the stigmatisation of the disease, and, through her experience of working with male activists in the movement, she learned how sexism and patriarchy could be reproduced in activist spaces. In addition, the quotation suggests that some of the learning took place through the practice of solidarity in activist spaces in the movement (through support from other comrades). This point is raised by Endresen and Von Kotze (2005) in their research on the TAC. The authors state:

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popular and political education is a critical part (Davis 2020a). Similarly, Davis points out that the "defund the police" demand is a product of abolitionist organising in the USA (Davis 2020b).

> Within the context of solidarity from others who empathise, infected activists regain their dignity and build self-esteem as they move from anger and despair, fear, and rage, to confidence and agency. (Endresen and Von Kotze 2005, 435)

Experience is an integral part of learning in activism. Choudry (2015,5) argues that conversations and the sharing of ideas in informal spaces and experience arising from participation in a movement/SMO, or from engaging in organising work, tend not to be considered as contributing towards learning and knowledge production in social movements/SMOs. Griff Foley (2001) contends that learning is integrally linked to people's engagement in, and it arises in experience of, social movement activism. Foley (2001, 78) writes that "critical learning is gained informally, through experience, by acting and reflecting on action, rather than in formal courses". "Experiential learning", for Foley (2001, 73), is an expression of radical emancipatory learning to the extent that grassroots activists have control over their learning experiences.

Direct forms of collective action, such as protests, are effective spaces for individual and collective experiential learning. For example, in the Fees Must Fall (FMF) movement in South Africa, many students gained valuable insights into the way the state tends to respond with violence to struggles for social change from their experience of participating in protests.[7] Apropos this, Busisiwe Seabe, who was a prominent member of the FMF movement at the University of the Witwatersrand, observes:

> That day at Union Buildings was the first time I encountered teargas and a rubber bullet. That thing burns. That was the first time I got shot. … We now clearly know who the enemy is. We should remain genuine in the call for free and decolonised education. Violence is our everyday language; the violence we encountered from the state that was mitigated to students showed the normal character of this country. (Masweneng 2020)

Experience was the main source of Msesiwe's activism in Nkani. Regarding the learning that takes place during community organising, she says:

> I'm learning every day, and I have to learn everything. … So, just to learn in the space [the community] versus attending a six-month course on community organising is a huge difference, because I'm learning in the space every day. I will learn today, get out of bed literally, because I'm learning. … I'm learning, I'm experiencing, I'm touching, and I'm feeling. So, there is a difference when you are learning and experiencing. (Interview, N. Msesiwe, 27 November 2020)

It means that learning is embedded in the everyday practices of the community organiser. Learning through practice is concrete and complex. It is concrete, as it is directly connected to action, and it is complex, because practice is always shaped by multiple, often contradictory dynamics.

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7   The high-handed way in which the police tend to respond to protests is a manifestation of state violence.

However, experiential learning is not inherently emancipatory. Carl Rodgers's distinction between "meaningless, oppressive and alienating learning" and "experiential learning" (Rodgers quoted in Foley 2001, 73) does not assist in understanding the complexity of experiential learning, as it ignores how it can reinforce the status quo. For example, in the context of Msesiwe's activism in Nkani, it cannot be taken for granted that her experiential learning about leadership equipped her with critical knowledge that enabled her to challenge the patriarchal masculinist approach to leadership that exists in many movements/SMOs.

In a shackdweller movement in Cape Town, I found that most women activists had no problem with the fact that most of the leaders were men. Most of them had no prior experience with political activism when they joined the movement. Much of their learning about collective action and about engaging the state occurred through experience in protests. They expressed no resistance to the gendered division of labour in the movement. Men gave the speeches at events, and they served as the point of contact for journalists and government officials, while women organised the meals and t-shirts (Steyn 2015). The situation may have been different if popular education was available for activists in the movement, because, as Choudry (2015) argues, the relationship between informal and non-formal forms of learning is complementary.

In Cooper's (2007) case study of SAMWU, she points out that experience was used merely to legitimate ideological positions from above in SAMWU's popular educational or non-formal educational activities. In other words, the use of experience in the union's popular educational activities was not really empowering, as it did not allow for workers to generate new ideas and perspectives from their experiences.

However, informal learning can democratise popular education if activists are able to make connections between what they learned through experience and the content of non-formal educational activities. For example, Somlavi drew on her personal experience in a popular education session that she conducted on menstrual health in EE. Her popular educational work on menstrual health was inspired by her own experience. She observes:

> I have always been passionate about sanitary pads and issues around menstrual health policy, and I was given the opportunity [in Equal Education] to run workshops on these issues. … Workshops [in EE] are not always orchestrated by a certain department. (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020)

Finally, grassroots activists generally do not consider informal and non-formal learning as separate forms of learning. The insights of all three activists underline the interconnectedness between informal learning and non-formal learning in activist settings. Regarding popular education activities in EE, Somlavi observes that "the lessons were structured in a manner that created understanding, such that if … [a person with limited literacy] … was to ask what equality means we could clearly explain to them" (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020). In addition, she says that activists

would create informal spaces for conversation about a specific topic or issue "before, during and after the workshops" (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020).

Msesiwe echoes Somlavi's sentiment when she says that "I have learned a lot from attending the workshops [at Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education and SJC]. I have also learned from being a branch secretary and becoming a chairperson at my son's high school" (Interview, N. Msesiwe, 27 November 2020). Thus, instead of assuming *a priori* that education, especially in a popular context, is "oppressive and alienating" (Rodgers quoted in Foley 2001, 73), we need to examine the pedagogical characteristics of popular educational activities. It means critically looking at how issues of language, experience, dogma and power relations shape education and learning.

For example, Shahrzad Mojab and Susan McDonald (2008), in their research on immigrant women's learning experiences in Canada, found that learning, especially experiential learning, is most effective if it occurs in a person's own language. The problem of language also applies to non-formal learning. The use of English in popular educational activities and educational materials, in a context in which it is the second or third language of many participants, can contribute towards feelings of exclusion and marginalisation in non-formal learning activist spaces. Regarding the TAC, Friedman and Mottiar (2004) observe that while discussions were vibrant at branch level, grassroots activists were generally silent in national meetings (where English was mainly used). For grassroots activists to play a critical role in the intellectual labour of social movements/SMOs, as Hlatshwayo (2013) argues, mother tongue should be incorporated into non-formal educational activities and activist debates.

Power and Learning in Social Movement Activism

As I indicate above, "race", social class, gender, and sexuality shape how learning takes place in both formal and non-formal/popular contexts (Mojab and McDonald 2008). And debates and practices in social movements/SMOs can contribute towards the perpetuation of structural racism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism (Choudry 2015). For instance, Shabalala indicates that while sexuality is regularly discussed in the TAC, the movement is unable to rid itself of homophobia (Interview, S. Shabalala, 28 November 2020). She also raises concerns about the power of middle-class activists in the TAC. She says:

> It has always been a concern where middle-class activists want to dictate and influence what really needs to happen on the ground. I have seen it when I was co-opted as the deputy secretary-general, in 2015. I did not allow myself to be remote-controlled, and, at some point, I had to tell them to please back off and allow us to make our own mistakes. … And when they give us advice, they should not expect us to do as they want us to do … because I'm the person on the ground. I know best what is happening on the ground. I feel insulted when a person who has never been in the situation that I am in tells me how to do something. (Interview, S. Shabalala, 28 November 2020)

Regarding Equal Education, Somlavi observes:

> There was a Black Consciousness workshop that was run by a white woman. That sparked a bigger conversation, and it was very unsettling to be taught about … Blackness … by a white person. Even though she delivered the information quite well, it was very unsettling. … People asked why they [the organisers] did not unpack how it's going to be a problem [if a white person is] telling us about our Blackness and struggles as black people. (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020)

She also remarks:

> It just doesn't make sense if a man is going to teach you about sexual and reproductive issues of women. … It does not make sense, because they don't have first-hand experience of what they are talking about. (Interview, W. Somlavi, 26 November 2020)

Unequal power relations in social movements/SMOs reflect social divisions and structural inequalities in society. Kelley (2002), for example, describes how the failure of the US white left, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to deal with the issue of structural racism left unchecked white supremacy in the socialist movement at the time.[8] Thus, it is very important that popular education addresses the underlying causes of exclusion and marginalisation within movements/SMOs. In the case of the TAC, without addressing the power structures that perpetuate the marginalisation of non-binary sexual identities in the movement, homophobic attitudes are unlikely to disappear.

While many scholars and activists recognise the co-constitutive nature of capitalism, structural racism, and patriarchy (Clarno 2017; Federici 2021), dismantling capitalism will not lead to the end of structural racism and patriarchy. There is a tendency, especially among left-wing scholars and activists, to reduce "race", gender, and sexuality to identity, and, as Gouin (2009, 162) points out, there is a tendency to treat racism and heteropatriarchy as mere "ideological supports to capitalism". This is wrong. As Robin Kelley (2017) points out, "race", gender and sexuality are social relations of power, and racism and heteropatriarchy are systems of power that, like capitalism, shape social relations at the economic, social, and ideological levels of society. In this sense, people's experiences of structural racism and heteropatriarchy are not divorced from socioeconomic relations in society.

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[8] In his assessment of the social movements of the 1960s in the USA, Kauffman (1995, 157) observes how consumerism contaminated struggles for recognition and inclusion in some movements. Buying certain labels was considered a form of symbolic activism. It points to the importance of values in struggles for social justice. This is underscored by Grace Lee Boggs in a message to the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. She says that: "You have to look at how you have become part of this culture. You will have to look at how many of you will be happy if you could become part Wall Street, become part of the corporations, if they will give you jobs" (Boggs 2011).

Sexism and homophobia are produced by heteropatriarchy, which is a system of power. Social movements/SMOs need to invest in popular and political education on the structural character of heteropatriarchy, which is important for understanding the institutional workings of the system. As I indicate above, analyses of heteropatriarchy that are concerned only with the attitudes and behaviour of perpetrators of homophobia, sexism, and gender-based violence will lead to ineffective solutions to these social problems. In addition, social movements/SMOs need to become more reflective of how social relations of power in movements/SMOs reproduce sexism, homophobia, gender-based violence, and classism.

Moreover, I expect most critics of identity politics to dismiss Somlavi's observation as a frivolous concern over identity. While the facilitator's lecture on Black Consciousness may have hit the right note, differences in the social experiences of the facilitator and the learners created the conditions for her to be deemed an outsider, regardless of how well-intentioned she may have been. These differences are rooted in South Africa's history of racial capitalism and whiteness (the embodiment of privileges/advantages), the contemporary neoliberal forms of racial capitalism and structural racism that are characterised by socioeconomic precariousness among the black masses, the continuing exclusion and marginalisation of black people, and the perpetuation of whiteness in a de facto form. The importance of a shared social experience between facilitator and learner in popular education is underscored by Endresen and Von Kotze (2005, 436) when they write:

> The TAC is a prime example of what happens when information and education is not just designed and delivered by Africans in local languages, but by people who themselves are infected/affected and who speak with the authority of their own experience.

The facilitator and the learners are also not neutral rational actors in a discussion on "race" and black experiences.[9] As Ellsworth (1989) points out, such a discussion cannot be free from concealed or expressed interests and emotions that are, at least partly, shaped by the actors' different locations in the racial structure of society. In his conceptualisation of emancipatory learning, Foley (2001) draws on Carl Rogers, who asserts that the facilitator is also a participant in the learning process "willingly carrying his [their] share of influence in and responsibility for the growth of the group, but not wanting to control it" (Rodgers quoted in Foley 2001, 73). Foley further notes that "solidarity means" that educators/facilitators use "their power to create educational situations in which learners can exercise power" without withdrawing or abandoning their own power (Rodgers quoted in Foley 2001, 75). I agree with Foley on the importance of democratising the learning environment to allow learners to exercise greater influence in knowledge production. However, I also agree with Ellsworth (1989), who says that the participants enter the learning environment with different

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[9] Motsemme (2002) shows how black women's experiences in post-apartheid South Africa are shaped by social class, sexuality, and ethnicity.

interests, advantages/privileges, and emotions. Thus, especially in discussions on oppression and social justice, it is inconceivable that every voice can carry equal weight.

It is also important to recognise that the institutionalisation of social struggles (bureaucracy, technical language) in hierarchically structured movements and social movement organisations places limitations on the participation of grassroots activists in knowledge production processes. This issue is not considered by Endresen and Von Kotze (2005), making their empirical account of the TAC a bit romantic. Friedman and Mottiar (2004) suggest that the technical nature of the scientific discourse on HIV, which was dominated by experts on the disease nationally, restricted the participation of grassroots activists. In the case of the Landless People's Movement, Greenberg (2006) observes that discussions on the land question mainly focused on how to influence government policy. According to Greenberg (2006, 142), the movement was controlled by a handful of NGO-based activists.

However, the experiences of the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) and FMF movements show that horizontally structured movements are not immune from exclusionary tendencies. Specifically, they illustrate how power divisions within a horizontally structured movement can close space for learning and reinforce the status quo. At the beginning, the movements were led by black heterosexual and non-binary women equipped with black radical feminist tools of analysis, such as intersectionality, which disrupted the male-dominated leadership culture that prevailed in the earlier crop of social movements. However, activists observed that heterosexual black men gradually positioned themselves as the leaders of the movements, and, consequently, critical intersectional thinking was marginalised (Malabela 2017; Ndelu 2017). At Rhodes University, some white students left Rhodes Must Fall because they were uncomfortable talking about "race" and class issues (Meth 2017). Importantly, the movements also exemplify how internal resistance can produce counter-narratives that challenge dominant ways of seeing and knowing (epistemology). For instance, at the University of Cape Town, transgender activists disrupted an RMF exhibition to protest the exclusion of their experiences from activist debates in the movement (Ndelu 2017).

Furthermore, power relations in social movements/SMOs determine whose experience and knowledge are valued in movements. For example, in 2015, a group of academics submitted a letter of concern to *Politikon* to remonstrate against an essay written by Bandile Mdlalose titled "The Rise and Fall of Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), a South African Social Movement", published in 2014. Bandile is a black queer activist and a former leader of the movement. Her narrative is a first-hand account of power dynamics that existed in AbM during her time in the movement. The academics argue that the author does not substantiate her claims about the movement, and she does not cite a secondary source relevant to the topic, thus, the essay should not have been published as a journal article (Friedman 2015). Interestingly, three unreferenced and unsubstantiated articles (none of them clearly marked as opinion pieces) authored by another leader of the movement, who was regarded as the linchpin of the movement by

some of the academics (Pithouse 2006), were published in other academic journals. None of the articles was subjected to criticism by any of the academics who were opposed to the publication of Mdlalose's narrative as an article. This illustrates what Choudry (2015, 6) calls "subtle forms of policing dissent internally within movements" by both insiders and sympathisers. Some of the responses sought to deligitimise the issues about power relations in the movement by vilifying the author (Huchzermeyer 2015). In addition, the academics seem to have given no regard to the fact that the voices of black women, especially those of working-class women, remain marginalised in society.

Finally, Rachel Gouin (2009, 160) posits an analytical framework for studying learning in activism that combines "political economy" with an "anti-racist feminist" lens. The premise of her anti-capitalist–anti-racist feminist framework is that capitalism, structural racism, and heteropatriarchy are interconnected oppressive systems (2009, 163), and, to understand the complexity of social struggles, it is necessary to pay attention to how different forms of oppression shape activism (2009, 171). She argues that Griff Foley's framework for studying informal learning in activism does not "contend with the complex realities of society and social struggle" (2009, 162). According to her, it reduces people's learning experiences to capitalism. In this regard, Gouin (2009, 161) remarks, "[a]lthough he is concerned with the role of ideology and discourse in learning and education, these take a peripheral role to a critique of capitalism". In addition, she points out that, for Foley, the socioeconomic situation gives context to education and learning, thus he "implicitly collapses everything into capitalism" (2009, 162).

By looking at learning in activist settings through the lens of power, it is possible to unmask the contradictory and contested nature of activist learning and knowledge production, highlighting the complexity of learning in social struggle. Considering the impact of power on learning, which is not reducible to social class and capitalism, means recognising that "social justice struggles" are "spaces that foster complex and contradictory learning" (Gouin 2009, 163). It requires experiences of learning and knowledge production to be politicised (Gouin 2009), and to understand that people's social experiences are historical and contextual. It means that, as Ellsworth (1989) points out, social movements/SMOs need to be explicit about how their pedagogies are addressing experiences of privilege, marginalisation and exclusion, mimicking the social context of society, in the learning and knowledge production process. Ellsworth (1989, 301) writes that pedagogies are needed to "make visible the political agenda of learning", for both the facilitator and the learners enter the learning environment "with investments of privilege and struggle".

The implication of this is that critical pedagogical approaches to learning should recognise that people experience power differently in society, and that they do not look at their lived experiences through a single lens (Gist 2016). As Ellsworth (1989) points out, critical pedagogies should be explicit from whose standpoint learning takes place.

It cannot be disconnected from "race", class, gender, and sexuality, but, at the same time, socially responsive pedagogies should not be applied in a reductionist way. Instead, as Conra Gist (2016, 248) explains in relation to black feminist critical pedagogy, a critical pedagogy that allows learners to understand and generate knowledge about the complex ways in which capitalism, structural racism and heteropatriarchy intersect in their lived experiences offers a greater opportunity for "personal and collective transformation".

Conclusion

In this article, I shed light on the relationship between informal and non-formal learning in social movements/SMOs. Different forms of learning can occur in social movements/SMOs. Informal learning can contribute towards empowerment, critical consciousness, and knowledge production in social movements/SMOs. However, more qualitative research is needed on learning in social movement activism. This research is important for understanding the complexity of learning and knowledge production in social movement activism.

It is important that the issue of power is brought into the analysis of learning because activists are not homogeneous political subjects. Non-formal learning or popular education in social movements/SMOs should be underpinned by social justice pedagogies that allow for critical conversations between activists on the role of power within the learning and knowledge production process, and for centring voices that are generally marginalised and excluded within society. It means that activists need to deal with the issue of positionality at the start of non-formal learning sessions, and they need to be explicit about the standpoint or standpoints from which learning takes place and knowledge is produced. Qualitative inquiries that consider the impact of "race", social class, gender, and sexuality, among other forms of power, on learning and knowledge production in activist settings will assist in explaining the contradictory and contested nature of learning and knowledge production in social movement activism. However, it should not be taken for granted that socially responsive pedagogies will automatically lead to the production of activist knowledge that is critical of the status quo, and that is transformative in its orientation. It is not enough to ensure that excluded and marginalised voices and experiences are centred within the learning and knowledge production process within movements/SMOs. It is also important to pay attention to how the knowledge that is produced by activists explains the underlying causes of exclusion and precariousness in society, and how this knowledge relates to collective action.

Acknowledgement

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